

## Message Text

SECRET

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43

ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

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O P 061219Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8516

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

RUEHDMASUAMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 2540

AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY

S E C R E T BEIRUT 1201

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, LE

SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON

1. AS DEPARTMENT MAY HAVE ANTICIPATED, WE ARE CONCERNED AT INCREASING SIGNS OF EGYPTIAN EFFORTS TO INTERFERE WITH SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON CEASEFIRE AND POLITICAL AGREEMENTS. IT IS DIFFICULT FOR US AT THIS DISTANCE TO KNOW WHETHER ANY SOUNDINGS FRENCH MAY HAVE MADE BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EGYPTIANS, SKAUDIS AND OTHER ARAB GOVERNMENTS MIGHT BE CONTRIBUTING TO PERCEPTIBLE EGYPTIAN CHANGE IN ITS PASSIVE ACCEPTANCE OF SYRIAN ROLE OF PAST COUPLE OF WEEKS. I AM SURE WE ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES SO CONCERNED AND HOPE THE DEPARTMENT IS DOING WHAT IT CAN TO TUNE OFF THE FRENCH AND TONE DOWN THE EGYPTIANS.

2. EGYPTIAN EMBASSY COUNSELOR ABDEL LATIF DROPPED IN TO SEE ME COUPLE OF DAYS AGO. SINCE HE HAD RETURNED FROM LEAVE IN CAIRO ONLY THREE DAYS BEFORE. I THINK THERE WAS SOME URGENCY IN HIS VISIT, THOUGHT HE DID NOT INDICATE ANY. HE CONCENTRATED ON DRAWING ME OUT ON U.S. VIEW OF WHAT THE SYRIANS ARE UP TO HERE. I TOOK VERY POSITIVE LINE. I POINTED OUT THAT LEBANON IS DIFFICULT FOR ANYBODY TO CONTROL

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UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. SYRIANS ARE RENDERING A

SERVICE BY PRESENT EFFORTS HERE FOR WHICH IT IS DIFFICULT TO  
VISUALIZE THEM BEING REWARDED BY ANY GREAT PERMANENT GROTH  
OF INFLUENCE. EVEN THOUGH THEY THEMSELVES MIGHT  
BELIEVE OTHERWISE. HE READILY AGREED WITH MY OBSERVATION THAT  
SYRIANS ARE LIKEL TO MAKE MORE FOES THAN FKRIENDS AS LONG  
AS THEY STAY MIXED IN THE LEBANSE SCENE. HE SAID  
HE HAD MADE THIS POINT HIMSELF TO PEOPLE HE TALKED TO IN  
CAIRO, BUT THERE WAS A VERY FIXED LINE BEING TAKEN IN CAIRO OF  
SUSPICION OF SYRIA IN EVERYTHING IT DID INCLUDING IN LEBANON.

3. THE ONLY OTHER MAJOR POINT I MADE WITH HIM WAS  
THAT THE WORST THAT COULD COME OUT OF GREATER SYRIAN IN-  
FLUENCE OVER LEBANESE POLICY IN NEAR FUTURE WOULD BE TO  
LINE UP LEBANON AS A CONFRONTATION STATE VIS-A-VIS ISRAEL.  
I THOUGHT EVEN IF ONE ASSUMED THIS MIGHT E IN THE BACK OF  
THE SYRIANS' MINDS (THOUGH I SAW NO CONVINCING EVIDENCE FOR IT)  
THERE ARE TWO REASONS NOT TO LET THAT ASSUMPTION  
RULE OUR POLICY TOWARD SYRIAN ROLE HERE. FIRST, SYRIANS  
WERE LIKELY TO DISCOVER AS THEY GOT CLOSER TO THEIR  
GOAL THAT IT WAS NOT REALLY POSSIBLE TO FORM SOLID LEBANESE ARMY  
WITH SOLID BACKING FROM LEBANESE GOVERNMENT IN CONFRONTATION  
TO ISRAELIS AND IN FACT WOULD HAVE TO CONCLUDE THAT LEBANESE  
NEUTRALITY IN ANY FUTURE CLASHES WITH ISRAEL. WAS  
MORE ADVANTAGEOUS THAN LEBANESE INVOLVEMENT. OTHER REASON,  
I SAID, IS THAT WORST THAT MIGHT COME OUT OF SUCH  
SYRIAN POLICY WOULD BE RENEWED WAR WITH ISRAEL IN LEBANESE  
TERRITORY. HOWEVER, SHOULD SYRIAN EFFORT TO PUT TOGETHER  
POLIKTICAL SETTLEMENT HERE FAIL, FIGHTING WAS LIKELY TO BREAK  
OUT AT HIGHER LEVELS THAN EVER BEFORE. SYRIAN PRESTIGE  
HAS ALREADY BEEN COMMITTED TOO FAR FOR SYRIANS TO AVOID  
MORE OVERT INTERFERENCE. THIS WAS LIKELY TO LEAD TO THAT  
SAME PREDICAMENT OF ISRAELI INVASION OF LEBANESE TERRITORY--  
BUT SOONER RATHER THAN LATER. THUS THERE IS  
NOTHING TO GAIN BY UNDERCUTTING SYRIAN EFFORTS AT THIS TIME  
NO MATTER HOW MUCH ONE MIGHT SUSPECT ULTIMATE SYRIAN  
INTENTIONS. ABDEL LATIF DID NOT ARGUE THESE POINTS.  
LAMBRAKIS

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NNN

## Message Attributes

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